

The State Journal-Register, November 9, 2004

If your friend asked you for your opinion on that new flavor, Twista Lime, what do you think you'd say?

Would you tell her that it's some of the best soda that you have ever tasted? Or, perhaps, that the new candy flavor isn't that good?

But it's not the name of a new soda flavor, or even a type of candy. It's the name of a cigarette - one of many "flavored cigarettes" that are being marketed by various tobacco companies.

As part of a current marketing trend, many companies are adding cigarettes that taste and smell sweeter to their failing product lines. Though they taste better, the cigarettes are just as addictive as regular cigarettes.

These companies claim this is just a way to give adult consumers more variety, but many teenagers are going to be intrigued by something with a name like Caribbean Chill.

"Of course it's aimed at children. An adult's not going to want to try a lemon-flavored cigarette. A teenager would," says Schuyler Garlits, a sophomore at Athens High School and a teen smoker.

Dr. Rebecca Anderson, a clinical psychologist at Memorial Medical Center, says this new product trend should be brought to the attention of the public.

"I'm concerned, and I think that parents should be concerned," Anderson says. "These are the products that might appeal to young people. While the use (of tobacco) is declining in adults, it is increasing in teenagers. Seventy-five percent of those smoking in high school will still be

smoking five years later."

According to Anderson, who leads the smoking-cessation program at Memorial, about 35 percent of high school students have used tobacco in the last month, and 90 percent of adults who smoke started as teenagers. The American Cancer Society says one-third of teen smokers will die prematurely as a result of their smoking. Scary numbers, when you think about it.

Some members of Congress are trying to do something about these products. U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, a Republican from Highland Park, joined several anti-tobacco groups in September to call on Congress to pass legislation giving the Food and Drug Administration authority over tobacco products.

Giving the FDA this authority could stop tobacco companies from marketing these products to teens and even ban the sale of these cigarettes altogether.

"(Candy-flavored cigarettes) should be regulated by the federal government, and once we get the regulation, we should ban them," Kirk says. "I think these cigarettes certainly are aimed at kids."

Unfortunately, the issue was removed from the bill it was a part of when Congress voted in October. Kirk says he'll keep fighting for a vote on this issue in hopes that the FDA might someday have the power to regulate tobacco products.

As teenagers, we might feel helpless in matters such as this, but we can always do our part by voicing our opposition to these products.

"The No. 1 thing (teens) should do is write their representative or senator and urge for FDA regulations," Kirk says. To find out who your representative is in Washington, visit www.house.gov/writerep

. You also can contact U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin, who represents the Springfield area, by visiting www.durbin.senate.gov/sitepages/contact.htm.

Smoking is never a good decision. If you smoke already, there are resources to help you stop.

Quit-Smart, a smoking-cessation program at Memorial Medical Center, is open for people of all ages who would like to quit smoking. If you are interested, call 788-3207.

St. John's Hospital Prevention and Mind-Body Services also offers an all-ages program. For more information, call 535-3990.

We can all do something to aid in the fight against tobacco. These are just a few places we can start.

Sara Myers is a sophomore at Athens High School.